

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY SAIGON IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652;;A

TAGS: PFOR, VS

SUBJECT:WASHINGTON POST ARTICLE OF JUNE 13

IN VIEW OF CURRENT CONGRESSIONAL AID HEARINGS, REQUEST
COMMENT ON FOLLOWING ARTICLE FROM JUNE 13 WASHINGTON POST BY
MCCOMBS, PARTICULARLY HIS REPORT THAT CHAU MAY STILL BE
UNDER ATTENTION.

QUOTE

1. FORMER LEGISLATOR TRAN NGOC CHAU'S "TEMPORARY RELEASE"
AFTER MORE THAN FOUR YEARS IN PRISON WAS SEEN HERE AS A
GOVERNMENT EFFORT TO CURRY FAVOR IN THE U.S. CONGRESS AT
A TIME WHEN CRUCIAL AID DECISIONS WERE BEING MADE THERE.

2. IN FACT, IT IS NOT AT ALL CLEAR THAT CHAU HAS BEEN
RELEASED.

3. HIS WIFE AND FOUR CHILDREN IN SAIGON WERE ALLOWED
TO SEE HIM IN THEIR HOME FOR 70 MINUTES ON THE NIGHT OF
JUNE 5, ACCORDING TO VIETNAMESE SOURCES.

4. BUT THEN A POLICE JEEP PULLED UP AND CHAU WAS WHISKED
AWAY, NOT TO BE SEEN OR HEARD FROM SINCE. NEITHER REPOR-
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TERS NOR HIS FRIENDS HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO TALK WITH HIM.

5. HE IS REPORTEDLY BEING KEPT IN CAM RANH CITY, 200 MILES NORTHEAST OF SAIGON -- PERHAPS UNDER HOUSE ARREST WITH A RELATIVE OR IN A PRISON.

6. CHAU WAS AN OUTSPOKEN LEADER OF THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION TO PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU AT THE TIME OF HIS ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT IN FEBRUARY 1970 ON CHARGES OF HAVING CONTACTED A COMMUNIST AGENT.

7. THE AGENT, HIS BROTHER, WAS A NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY INTELLIGENCE CAPTAIN. CHAU, WHO FAVORED PEACE THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE COMMUNISTS, WAS REPORTING REGULARLY ON HIS CONTACT TO U.S. OFFICIALS, INCLUDING THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY.

8. CHAU WAS A GREAT FAVORITE WITH MANY AMERICANS HERE, INCLUDING HIS OLD FRIEND JOHN PAUL VAHN, THE FLAMBOYANT AND CONTROVERSIAL OFFICIAL OF THE PACIFICATION PROGRAM WHO DIED IN A 1972 HELICOPTER CRASH IN KONTUM PROVINCE DURING THE LAST NORTH VIETNAMESE OFFENSIVE.

9. VIETNAM OFFICIALS NOW CONCEDE PRIVATELY THAT IT WAS CHAU'S UNAUTHORIZED CONTACT WITH THE AMERICANS -- NOT THE COMMUNISTS -- THAT INFURIATED THIEU AND LED TO CHAU'S ARREST.

10. CHAU'S ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT RECEIVED MUCH ATTENTION IN THE UNITED STATES, WHERE HE HAS BEEN WIDELY REGARDED AS ONE OF THIEU'S MOST IMPORTANT POLITICAL PRISONERS.

11. TO RELEASE HIM AT THIS TIME, ACCORDING TO VIETNAMESE SOURCES, WHEN ONLY HALF OF HIS 10-YEAR TERM AT HARD LABOR HAS BEEN SERVED, MIGHT IMPROVE THIEU'S IMAGE IN THE UNITED STATES.

12. THE MORNING AFTER CHAU'S 70 MINUTES WITH HIS FAMILY, VIETNAMESE POLICE CALLED NEWSPAPERS IN SAIGON AND TOLD THEM CHAU HAD BEEN RELEASED, URGING THEM TO WRITE ARTICLES ABOUT IT.

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13. MANY DID. FOR EXAMPLE, A BANNER HEADLINE IN THE SAIGON POST, THE CITY'S ENGLISH-LANGUAGE DAILY, PROCLAIMED, "EX-DEPUTY CHAU FREED AFTER FIVE-YEAR STRETCH."

14. THAT SAME DAY, JUNE 6, REPORTERS AT A DAILY PRESS BRIEFING PRESSED A GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN FOR DETAILS AND WERE TOLD THAT CHAU HAD BEEN "TEMPORARILY RELEASED."

NO FURTHER SUBSTANTIAL DETAILS WERE PROVIDED.

15. CHAU'S FRIENDS IN THE LEGISLATURE AND OTHER POLITICAL OBSERVERS HERE NOW SAY THEY DO NOT EXPECT CHAU TO BE RELEASED AT ALL -- BUT THE GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY BENEFITED FROM THE PUBLICITY.

16. CHAU'S "RELEASE" APPEARS TO BE ONE OF A NUMBER OF ORCHESTRATED MOVES MADE RECENTLY BY THE THIEU GOVERNMENT TO "CREATE A SUITABLE ATMOSPHERE FOR THE AID STRUGGLE ON CAPITOL HILL," IN THE WORDS OF ONE GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL.

17. OTHER MOVES INCLUDE: THIEU'S ACCUSATIONS OF BETRAYAL BY THE UNITED STATES IN HIS IMPASSIONED JUNE 6 SPEECH TO A NATIONAL TEACHERS CONVENTION. THE PRESIDENT CHARGED THAT IF THE UNITED STATES HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO FORCE ITS ORIGINAL VERSION OF THE PARIS AGREEMENTS ON SOUTH VIETNAM, THE COUNTRY WOULD HAVE GONE COMMUNIST IN SIX MONTHS.

18. "UPON SIGNING THE AGREEMENT," HE SAID, "WE WERE UNEQUIVOCALLY PROMISED THAT THE COMMUNISTS WOULD BE KEPT FROM INFILTRATING THE SOUTH AND THAT IF THEY INFILTRATED, THEY WOULD MEET WITH A STRONG REACTION. HOWEVER, ALL THE PROMISES MADE BY OUR ALLY ... HAVE BEEN FORGOTTEN."

19. THE SPEECH ALSO CONTAINED A PLEA FOR CONTINUED U.S. AID WHICH THIEU SAID WAS PROMISED AT THE TIME THE PARIS AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED.

20. IN ANOTHER STEP WHICH SHOULD AID SAIGON'S CAUSE IN WASHINGTON, THE GOVERNMENT RESTORED THE DIPLOMATIC PRIVILEGES OF THE VIETCONG DELEGATION TO THE COMMISSION CHARGED WITH IMPLEMENTING THE CEASE-FIRE.

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21. THE RESTORATION, INCLUDING TELEPHONE SERVICE AND THE WEEKLY VIETCONG PRESS CONFERENCE, BROUGHT AGREEMENT FROM THE VIETCONG DELEGATION TO RENEW THE CEASE-FIRE COMMISSION'S TALKS WHICH HAD BEEN SUSPENDED FOR MORE THAN A MONTH.

22. THE FREQUENT ANNOUNCEMENT BY GOVERNMENT MILITARY SPOKESMEN OF ISOLATED GOVERNMENT BASES BEING "OVERRUN" BY COMMUNIST FORCES WHEN IN FACT GOVERNMENT TROOPS ABANDONED THE BASES AND LEFT THEM TO THE ENEMY MAY ALSO BE DESIGNED TO AFFECT THE VIETNAM DEBATE IN CONGRESS.

23. WESTERN NEWSMEN HAVE ALSO DUTIFULLY REPORTED THESE "OVERRUNS" WHICH CARRY AN IMPLICATION OF SPECIAL AGGRESSION BY THE COMMUNIST ONLY TO LEARN DAYS LATER FROM

RELIABLE SOURCES THAT, IN MANY CASES, BASES WERE NOT
OVERRUN AT ALL.

24. U.S. AMBASSADOR GRAHAM MARTIN, A LEADER IN THE FIGHT
FOR MORE AID FOR SOUTH VIETNAM, HAS BROUGHT INCREASING
PRESSURE ON THIEU TO "CREATE A SUITABLE ATMOSPHERE,"
SOURCES SAID. UNQUOTE. SISCO

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